



United States Census Records

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United States census records provide a wealth of information. Indexed images and copies of census schedules are widely available for research. The regularity (every 10 years starting in 1790) of the federal census provide a view of the same family through time.

OBJECTIVES

- Understand the value of census records
- Learn how to use census records
- Learn how to access census records

VALUE OF CENSUS RECORDS

A well-indexed census is one of the **easiest ways to locate where an ancestor lived** and when they lived there.

- Census records tend to be available
- Information is quite reliable
- Follow the family over time.
- They answer genealogy questions: names, relationships, dates and places
- Indicate migration patterns by the birth and death dates and places.
- Different questions were asked; yielding additional information.
- Locate extended family and learn who the neighbors are.
- Used together, they build a strong case and pedigree

Legislated by congress - purpose of representation

USING CENSUS RECORDS

The following process works well for using census records:

1. Identify the year and place. The year depends on your research goal, but should be close to an event you can document. When in doubt, check a recent census before trying to find the family on an earlier census. The place is usually the state where the family is living.
2. The censuses are indexed, imaged, and available online.

3. Review what you find. Analyze the information given on the census. Compare the evidence with other known facts about the family.

EXPLANATION

Items to remember:

- Census records between 1790 and 1840 only name the head of the household. One line on the population schedule describes the whole family unit.
- Census records between 1850 and 1940 name all people. One line on the population schedule describes one person.
- The federal government takes a census on the zero (0) year of the decade.
- The 1890 population schedule was destroyed by fire in 1921.
- Many census schedules are available on microfilm.
- The 1940 census is the most recent census available to the public because of a 72-year privacy rule. (1950 to be released in 2022)

1790-1840 CENSUSES

Locate ancestors over time (at least the head of household)
Provide clues about relationships and the number of children
Provide a birth year range for each person

1850-1940 CENSUSES

Locate ancestor's overtime (10 year snapshot)
Provide names and an approximate birth year and birth place
Determine relationships, number of children, address
Provides occupation, economic status, means of support, education, and medical condition

CAUTIONS IN USING CENSUS RECORDS

- Handwriting – legibility
- Abbreviations: locality, relationship, and occupations
- Incorrect information – who was the informant? (an adult, child or neighbor)
- INCOMPLETE

CENSUS RECORDS ARE CRITICAL

- Census records will help you find your family within the United States
- The records will lead you to the vital records, probate records, land records, and other records that can further your research
- You can and will have success in searching census records!

AVAILABILITY OF CENSUS RECORDS

INTERNET SITES

- National archives record administration. They house the original census records. This site has a genealogy section that discusses census records.
www.archives.gov

- *U.S. Census Bureau.* This site does not have specific information about census records 1790 to 1930, because that information is at the National Archives. This site has contemporary information, statistical information, and geographic information about the census.
www.census.gov
- *FamilySearch Internet*
www.familysearch.org
- *Ancestry, Inc.* a subscription site that contains indexes and images of the population schedules.
www.ancestry.com
- *Cyndi's List of Genealogy Sites on the Internet.* Use the section called *U.S.-Census*.
- www.cyndislist.com
- *HeritageQuest Online.* Indexes and images available through many public libraries.
www.heritagequestonline.com
- Soundex helps. They include Soundex conversion programs.
<http://resources.rootsweb.com/cgi-bin/soundexconverter>
- [Find My Past](#)
- [State Archives](#) / Historical and Genealogical Societies

REFERENCE AIDS

Printed Helps

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- Kemp, Thomas Jay. *The American Census Handbook*. Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources Inc., 2001. (FHL book 973 X23k)
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- Thorndale, William and William Dollarhide. *Map Guide to US Federal Censuses, 1790-1920*. Baltimore, Md.: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1987. (FHL book 973 X2th)

CONTENT OF FEDERAL CENSUSES

U.S. Census Contents for the Years 1850 to 1930

Data	1850	1860	1870	1880	1890	1900	1910	1920	1930
Name of each person	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Dwelling Number, Family Number, Enumeration District	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Post office address		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Street addresses (in cities)				✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Age at last birthday	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Gender and race	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Marital Status				✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Relationship to Head				✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Occupation	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Real property \$	✓	✓	✓						✓
Personal property \$		✓	✓						
Place of birth	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Place of parent's birth				✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Length of time in U.S.						✓	✓	✓	✓
If farm/home owned/rented						✓	✓	✓	✓
Number of years married						✓	✓		✓
Citizenship Status			✓			✓	✓	✓	✓
If speaks English						✓	✓	✓	✓
Children born						✓	✓		
If married within year	✓	✓	✓	✓					
If in school	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
If cannot read or write (adults)	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
If deaf, blind, insane, idiotic		✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	
Month of birth if born within year			✓	✓					
If parent's were of foreign birth			✓						
Time employed within year				✓		✓	✓		

1940: name of each person, Dwelling information, age, gender, race, marital status, relationship to head, occupation, place of birth, citizenship, employment status and more

Types of Census Schedules

	1790	1800	1810	1820	1830	1840	1850	1860	1870	1880	1890	1900	1910	1920	1930
Population	■	■	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	■	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mortality							■	■	■	■					
Veterans						✓					■				
Agriculture						■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■		
Manufacture			■	■		■	■	■	■	■					
Slave							✓	✓							
Social Statistics							■	■	■	■					

Legend:

- ✓ = The schedule exists and is available
- = Some parts are missing or destroyed

U.S. Census Contents for the Years 1790-1840

Detail	1790	1800	1810	1820	1830	1840
Name of Family Head	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Males – under 16	all	under 10, 10- 16			under 5, 5 - 10, 10 - 15	
Males – 16 and older	all	16 - 26, 26 - 45, 45 and over (1820 had 16 - 18)			15 - 20, then 10-year groups, ages 20-99.	
Females – under 16	all	under 10, 10 - 16			under 5, 5 - 10, 10 - 15	
Females – 16 and older		16 - 26, 26 - 45, 45 and over			15 - 20, then 10-year groups, ages 20-99	
All other persons	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Slaves	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Foreigners not naturalized				✓	✓	✓